

**U.S. Food and Drug Administration
Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition
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Guidance on How to Understand and Use the Nutrition Facts Panel on Food Labels

People look at food labels for different reasons. But whatever the reason, many consumers would like to know how to use this information more effectively and easily. The following guidance is intended to make it easier for you to use nutrition labels to make quick, informed food choices that contribute to a healthy diet.

The Nutrition Facts panel has two parts: the main or top section (see #1-5 on the attached nutrition label), which contains product-specific information (serving size, calories, and nutrient information) that varies with each food product; and the bottom part (see #6 on the attached nutrition label), which contains a footnote. This footnote is only on larger packages and provides general dietary information about important nutrients.

Macaroni & Cheese

Nutrition FactsServing Size 1 cup (228g)
Serving Per Container 2**Amount Per Serving****Calories** 250 Calories from Fat 110**% Daily Value***

Total Fat 12g	18%
Saturated Fat 3g	15%
Cholesterol 30mg	10%
Sodium 470mg	20%
Total Carbohydrate 31g	10%
Dietary Fiber 0g	0%
Sugars 5g	
Protein 5g	
Vitamin A	4%
Vitamin C	2%
Calcium	20%
Iron	4%

* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet.
Your Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:

	Calories:	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Sat Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

① **Start Here** →

②

③ **Limit these
Nutrients**④ **Get Enough
of these
Nutrients**⑥ **Footnote****Quick Guide
to % DV**

⑤

**5% or less
is Low****20% or more
is High**

The Serving Size:

Serving Size 1 cup (228g)
Serving Per Container 2

([See #1](#)):

The first place to start when you look at the Nutrition Facts panel is the serving size and the number of servings in the package. Serving sizes are provided in familiar units, such as cups or pieces, followed by the metric amount, e.g., the number of grams. Serving sizes are based on the amount of food people typically eat, which makes them realistic and easy to compare to similar foods.

Pay attention to the serving size, including how many servings there are in the food package, and compare it to how much YOU actually eat. The size of the serving on the food package influences all the nutrient amounts listed on the top part of the label. In the example, one serving of macaroni and cheese equals one cup. If you ate the whole package, you would eat two cups. That doubles the calories and other nutrient numbers, including the %Daily Values (see Calories and %Daily Value for more information).

Calories and Calories from Fat

Amount Per Serving	
Calories 250	Calories from Fat 110
% Daily Value*	

([See #2](#)):

Calories provide a measure of how much energy you get from a serving of this food. The label also tells you how many of the calories in one serving come from fat. In the example, there are 250

calories in a serving of this macaroni and cheese. How many *calories from fat* are there in ONE serving? Answer: 110 calories, which means almost half come from fat. What if you ate the whole package content? Then, you would consume two servings, or 500 calories, and 220 would come from fat.

The Nutrients ([See #3 and 4](#)): Look at the top section in the attached nutrition label. It shows nutrients that are important for your health and separates them into two main groups:

Limit These Nutrients

Total Fat 12g
Saturated Fat 3g
Cholesterol 30mg
Sodium 470mg

([See #3](#)):

The nutrients listed first are the ones Americans generally eat in adequate amounts, or even too much. They are identified in yellow on the chart as **Limit these Nutrients**. Eating too much fat or too much sodium may increase your risk of certain chronic diseases, like heart disease, some cancers, or high blood pressure. Eating too many calories is

linked to overweight and obesity.

Get Enough of These

Dietary Fiber 0g
Vitamin A
Vitamin C
Calcium
Iron

(See #4):

Americans often don't get enough dietary fiber, vitamin A, vitamin C, calcium, and iron in their diets. They are identified in blue on the chart as **Get Enough of these Nutrients**. Eating enough of these nutrients can improve your health and help reduce the risk of some diseases and conditions. For example, getting enough calcium can reduce the risk of osteoporosis, in which bones become brittle and break as one ages (see calcium example).

Remember: You can not only use the food label to help limit those nutrients you want to cut back on, but also to increase those nutrients you want to consume in greater amounts.

The Percent Daily Value (%DV): This part of the Nutrition Facts panel tells you whether the nutrients (fat, sodium, fiber, etc) in a serving of food contribute a lot or a little to your total daily diet. By diet we mean all the different foods you eat in a day.

%DVs are based on recommendations for a 2,000 calorie diet. For labeling purposes, FDA set 2,000 calories as the reference amount for calculating %DVs. The %DV shows you the percent (or how much) of the recommended daily amount of a nutrient is in a serving of food. By using the %DV, you can tell if this amount is high or low. You, like most people, may not know how many calories you consume in a day. But you can still use the %DV as a frame of reference, whether or not you eat more or less than 2,000 calories each day.

It's not hard to follow nutrition experts' advice for a healthy diet. Try to limit your total daily intake of fat, saturated fat, sodium, and cholesterol (shown in yellow on the chart) to **less** than 100%DV.

Likewise, you should try to get enough essential nutrients like calcium, iron, and vitamins A and C as well as other components such as dietary fiber (shown in blue on the chart). Try to average 100% for each one of these nutrients each day.

%DVs are easy to use. Do you need to know how to calculate percentages to follow this advice? No, the label (the %DV) does the math for you. It helps you interpret the numbers (grams and milligrams) by putting them all on the same scale (0-100%DV), much like a ruler. This way you can tell high from low and know which nutrients contribute a lot, or a little, to your daily recommended limit (upper or lower).

Example of %DV for Total Fat: If you cover up the %DV on this label, can you tell if 12g of Total Fat is high or low? Another way of asking this question is, does one serving (containing 12g of fat) contribute a lot or a little Total Fat to your daily diet? Now look at the %DV on the label example: 12g fat equals 18%DV. When one serving of macaroni and cheese contains 18%DV for Total Fat, that means you have 82% of your fat allowance left for all the other foods you eat that day ($100\% - 18\% = 82\%$).

Quick Guide to %DV

(See #5):

This general guide tells you that 5%DV or less is low and 20%DV or more is high. This means that **5%DV or less is low** for all nutrients, those you want to limit (e.g., fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, and sodium), and those that you want to consume in greater amounts (fiber, calcium, etc). As the **Quick Guide** shows, **20%DV or more is high** for all nutrients.

Example: Look again at the amount of Total Fat in one serving listed on the attached nutrition label for macaroni and cheese. Is 18%DV contributing a lot or a little to your maximum fat limit of 100% DV? Check the **Quick Guide to %DV**. You see that 18%DV, which is below 20%DV, is not yet high, but what if you ate the whole package (two servings)? You would double that amount, eating 36% of your daily maximum for Total Fat. That amount, coming from just one food, would contribute a lot of fat to your daily diet. It would leave you 64% of your fat allowance ($100\% - 36\% = 64\%$) for *all* of the other foods you eat that day, snacks and drinks included.

Comparisons: The %DV also makes it easy for you to make comparisons. You can compare one product or brand to a similar product. It's easy to see which one is higher or lower in a nutrient because the serving sizes are generally consistent for similar types of foods.

Nutrient Content Claims: You can quickly distinguish one claim from another, such as “reduced fat” vs. “light”. Just compare the %DVs for Total Fat in each food product to see which one is higher or lower in that nutrient--**there is no need to memorize definitions**. This works when comparing all nutrient content claims, e.g., less, low, free, more, high, etc.

Dietary Trade-Offs: You can **use the %DV to help you make dietary trade-offs** with other foods throughout the day. You don't have to give up a favorite food to eat a healthy diet. When a food you like is high in fat, balance it with foods that are low in fat at other times of the day. Also, pay attention to how much you eat so that the total amount of fat for the day stays below 100%DV.

Sugars and Protein: Note that neither Sugars nor Protein lists a %DV on the Nutrition Facts panel.

Sugars: No daily reference value has been established because no recommendations have been made for the total amount of sugars to eat in a day. Keep in mind, the sugars listed on the Nutrition Facts panel include naturally occurring sugars (like those in fruit and milk) as well as those added to a food or drink. Check the ingredient list for specifics on added sugars.

Protein: A %DV is required to be listed if a claim is made for protein, such as "high in protein". Otherwise, unless the food is meant for use by infants and children under 4 years old, none is needed. Current scientific evidence indicates that protein intake is not a public health concern for adults and children over 4 years of age.

Calcium: Experts advise consumers to consume adequate amounts of calcium in their daily diet. This advice is given in milligrams (mg), but the Nutrition Facts panel only lists a %DV for calcium. For consumers to know how the calcium they consume relates to expert advice, they need to do some simple math. (This applies to calcium only).

For example: Experts advise adolescents, especially girls, to consume 1,300 mg and post-menopausal women 1,200 mg of calcium daily. To find the %DV that corresponds with

1,300mg and 1,200mg, just divide the number of mg by 10. (The DV for calcium on food labels is 1,000mg). When converted to a percent, this gives a factor of 10. Thus, the daily target for teenage girls, 1,300 mg , equals 130%DV, and the daily target for post menopausal women, 1,200 mg, equals 120%DV.

If you want to convert the %DV for calcium into milligrams, just multiply by 10. A container of yogurt, might list 30%DV for calcium. To convert this to milligrams, multiply by 10, which equals 300 mg of calcium for the yogurt.

The important thing is to look at the %DV for calcium on the food package so you know how much one serving contributes to the *total amount you need*. Remember, a food with 20%DV or more contributes a lot of calcium to your daily total, while one with 5%DV or less contributes a little.

The Footnote, or lower part of the Nutrition Facts Panel

* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your Daily Values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:

	Calories:	2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Sat Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	Less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

(See #6)

Note the * used after the heading “%Daily Value” on the Nutrition Facts panel. It refers to the Footnote in the lower part of the nutrition label, which tells you that “**%DVs are based on recommendations for a 2,000 calorie diet**”. This statement must be on all food labels. But the remaining information in the full footnote may not be on the package if the size of the label is too small. When the full footnote does appear, it will always be the same. It doesn't change

from product to product, because it shows dietary advice for all Americans--it is not about a specific food product.

The Daily Values are based on expert dietary advice about how much, or how little, of some key nutrients you should eat each day, depending on whether you eat 2,000 or 2,500 calories a day.

For example, look at the Total Fat information in the footnote. It tells you that if you eat a 2,000 calorie diet, you should eat *less than 65g of fat in **all** the foods* you eat in a day. By doing this, you will follow nutrition experts' advice to consume no more than 30 percent of your daily calories from fat. Because the DV for total fat is “less than 65g”, this is the same thing as saying, to keep your total fat intake for the day below 100%DV.

If you consume 2,500 calories per day, the Footnote shows you how your daily values would change for some nutrients but not for others. The Daily Values for Sodium (2,400mg sodium) and for Cholesterol (300mg) remain the same no matter how many calories you eat. But recommended levels of intake for other nutrients do depend on how many calories you consume.

Remember: %DVs listed on the top half of the food label are based on recommendations for a 2,000 calorie diet, not a 2,500 calorie diet.

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